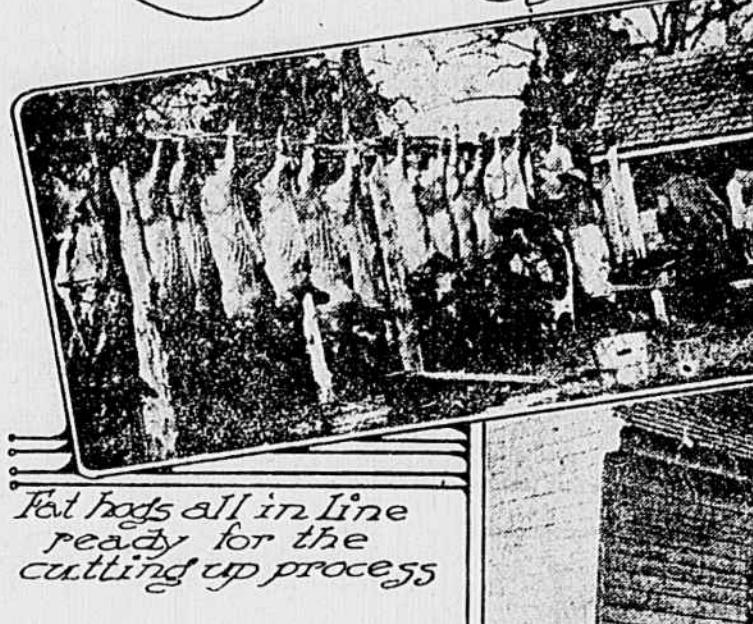


Friendly Spirit of Old Time Christmas Is Felt All Over Virginia

CHRISTMAS SEASON
AS SEEN ON THE FARM

Christmas Scenes on Typical Old Virginia Farm



any Plantations Keep Up Celebration in Spirit of Old Dominion.

FESTIVE TIME IN COUNTRY

"Killing" Christmas Hunts and Virginia Reel Bring Back the Old Days—Negroes Share Pleasures of White Employers.

BY J. M. DELL.

In Virginia, and especially in that portion known as the Tidewater section, many of the old Christmas customs still prevail. This is a section where large plantations, many of them historic, are the rule. The brick mansions are fine examples of Colonial architecture, and negro labor is still employed. On many farms the negroes are the dusky descendants of former slaves.

Let us suppose it is the middle of December, only two weeks from Christmas, and the feelings of that beautiful season of mirth and family reunions are at hand.

One of the very first of the many preparations will be the killing of the hogs which, taken off grass some three weeks before, are now in their prime, stuffing good ear corn to repletion.

JUST GET UP EARLY TO WITNESS HOG-KILLING

You hear it said around the house that "hogs will be killed in the morning." If you have never seen one of these old Virginia hog-killing you had better get up about 2 o'clock. You will find a big fire kindled around the huge hog pen. There will be a whiskey or negar barrel, one end set in the ground. In front of this and raised by logs of wood will be the cleaning platform. The ruddy light from the big fire casts a dusky glow over the forms of the faces of the negroes, farm hands, and of hogs, and while the stars are shining brightly in the winter sky, the "hog killing" begins. As a fat porker is stuck, he is raised out of the pen, dragged up to the barrel, now nearly full of hot water, and scalded in head and tail. In a short time he is scalded and hung on the kambrels.

My auntie an ordinary killing will be over. The next day the meat will be cut up. Then there will be the red-trying and the sausage-making. Pork, ham, spare rib, chine and sausage will form a northern part of the fare during "Christmas week," or no work will be done from Christmas Eve until after New Year's Day, when it is something imperative, like the tediousness of loading a vessel with hay or grain.

THE YULE LOG IS STILL A FEATURE

Although our winters are mild in comparison with those of the North, and the woodpile on a Virginia plantation is one of the features of the festive occasion. Oak, hickory, pine and cypress will be found among the logs. A great open fire in the parlors, dining or sitting-rooms.

Not only will the "great house" be supplied with wood for every room, but every darkest quarter will have its share.

Stoves are now in use in many houses all degrees, and furnaces are being built in some, but, on the whole, the open fire-place still holds its own in the hearts of the people, and it can be said that the traveler will hardly stop on an old-time Tidewater Virginia home without its open fireplaces in it. The logs are piled high during the Christmas season. The illustration shows one of the old-time dainties in the Yule log to the "great house."

CONTINUE HONORED CUSTOM OF DECORATING HOMES

The time-honored custom of decorating the homes for this festive season still exists, and at least a week before Christmas, "off to the woods do the men go, to pick up holly, hollyhocks, mistletoe, pine, running cedar and the like. Soon parlor, hall, dining-rooms and bedrooms will be gay with Christmas greens.

This is a never-varying custom, and a splite of all of the changes which have taken place, it would be hard to find a home that did not have some remnant in the way of evergreen decoration emblematic of Christmas.

In many localities the Episcopal church still is the popular one. Christmas morning services are held, and the churches of worship will have been decked out with beautiful decorations of holly, pine and running cedar, while over the pulpit is generally seen a great star, the story of which has gone down the ages as the most beautiful ever told.

CHRISTMAS HUNTS YET SPORT OF KINGS

The fields, woods, as well as the big river marshes in the Tidewater section, still provide good sport of a general nature. Fox hunting (as loved by Virginians) is yet indulged in. Wire fences, and the cutting up of so many of the larger estates, has not broken the sport of the "Kings." There yet remain good packs of native hounds that make the welkin ring at Christmas time, as they chase "Mr. Reynard" through the great bodies of unfenced woods. Rabbit hunting also gives good sport to guest and host.

Quail shooting, one of the most popular forms of outdoor sports, has its thousands of votaries. The season is open in the Old Dominion at Christmas time. A bird hunt is in order at this festive season. Ducks and geese are fairly plentiful in the great marshes lying along the various rivers of Tidewater Virginia. A shot at a flock of them may mean an addition to the bag of black duck, or mallard, or perhaps a savory goose to augment the already generous Christmas larder.

The "Christmas" hunts are looked forward to and enjoyed by all. The "city cousins" have a chance at this time to try their skill in bagging such game as has been enumerated. If luck attends them they go home rejoicing; if the bag was small and luck somewhat hard, they at least have had the pleasure of knowing that their hosts have given them every opportunity to distinguish themselves; also that the Christmas larder was most abundant, even if they were not able to add to it.

HEALTH IS PLEDGED IN MELLOW WHISKY

Let us imagine ourselves at one of the old mansions, and we are back from church. The gentlemen are seated around the big open fire in the parlor, the ladies going to their preparatory to their appearance at dinner. The host, who has excused himself for a few moments, now returns with a cut-glass pitcher of apple

toddy and a decenter of mellow, old whiskey. Healths are drunk with all sincerity. Toasts are pledged, and as the second glass goes around, the ladies come tripping down stairs and a servant announces dinner "is ready."

In the centre of the polished table is a great bowl of holly, a bunch of mistletoe hangs from the chandelier above. The mantle over the fireplace is gay with Christmas decorations. Each picture along the walls has its wreath of running cedar and holly. A cheerful fire blazes on the hearth. All are seated and merry quip and jest pass around as the host carves the fat, young, home-raised goblet, which forms the piece de resistance for the festive feast. What a noble bird it is, and how delicious with its rich dressing and gravy.

A fine sugar-cured ham no doubt adorns the other end of the hospitable board. Celery, spinach, sautéed Irish potatoes, candied sweet potatoes, all home-grown vegetables from the old garden, help to round out the generous menu.

Now, the table is cleared by the servant, and dessert is brought in. A really jolly looking plum pudding, a sprig of holly stuck in it, jelly in cut glass dishes, blanc mange, white or chocolate; meringue pies, and cake, the dessert flanked by its accompaniment, wine. A feast fit for the gods, and much of it supplied from the rich, well-titled farm.

The sun is getting low as the merry party leaves the table for the parlor. Servants and also some of the children of the "farm hands" come in for their "Christmas" presents, and it can be truthfully said, that every one on the farm will be remembered this day. The presents will be inexpensive, but this dear old custom of looking out for the mental, as well as the relative and friend, is never forgotten.

While the servants smile and give sincere thanks for the simple remembrances, the gifts for the family are distributed. Of course the servants and even darky children from the "quarters" must have a look at "de white folks' gifts," and they show a genuine delight at the sight.

CHRISTMAS DANCE NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN

The East Virginians are proverbial for enjoying all the pleasures as they come in season, and the "Christmas dance" with its darky fiddlers, its fine, 12 o'clock supper and its waltzes, two-steps, the lancers, square, sets and Virginia reel, make an occasion of this sort one not to be forgotten.

From the time the lamps are lighted and the dusky musicians call out the challenge "Choose yo partners fer de fust quadrille," till they play the old waltz, "Honey Sweet Home, as the stars are fading and the dawn's rooster is crowing for day, the fun is fast and furious, but all in keeping with propriety. With the coming of dawn, the merry crowd bids adieu to host and hostess, and one more old-time Virginia dance has become a memory.

The changes incident to the Civil War, along with the freedom of the slaves, have had their effect on the social life of the country districts in the Old Dominion. These changes, important as they were, have not, however, changed hands, some of them many times, but the fact yet remains that many of the ante-bellum Christmas customs are still extant, as the writer can avow, he having spent over thirty years of his life as farmer in this favored section, and having seen the binder supplant the "cradle" in the harvest fields, the mowers take the place of the old-time scythe, the sulky and steam plow usurp the place of the walking plows of old-time farm.

GASOLINE ENGINE IN PLACE OF NEGRO HELP

The gasoline engine is now pumping water where the "nigger boy" used to draw from the well, the chief ornament of which was the "old oaken bucket." The corn shredder is doing the work in shucking or husking the big white ears, in place of the crowds of darkies, who, in former days, shucked the great piles of corn while the stars were shining.

Too many of the negroes have left the old plantations and have taken up other lines of work, but as long as country life lasts in "Old Virginia," the "Christmas" season, with all its simple and hearty joys, will be observed by those who live on the old plantations, as both white and colored strive to keep alive the time-honored traditions which have furnished a theme for writer and poet.

For them there's neither bread nor home this happy Christmas Day.

But look! there comes a message from far across the deep,
From hearts that still can pity and eyes that still can weep:
O little lips ahunger! O faces pale and wan!
There's somewhere, somewhere peace on earth, somewhere good will to man.
Across the waste of waters, a thousand leagues away,
There's some one still remembers that here it's Christmas Day.

O God of Peace, remember, and in Thy mercy keep
The hearts that still can pity, the eyes that still can weep.
Amid the shame and torment, the ruins and the graves
To theirs, the land of freedom, from what answer can we send them? We can but kneel and pray:
God grant, God grant, to them at least a happy Christmas Day.

THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE.
(By Cassie Moncreux Lyne.)

Ring Christmas bells! Ring loud and long,
To tell to all the earthly throng
The message angels spoke to men,
That Christ was born in Bethlehem.

Ring Christmas bells—as on that morn,
When shepherds knew a Prince was born,
And wise men journeyed from afar
With precious gifts—their guide a star.

Ring Christmas bells while snow-flakes fall,
Since last you rang an awful pall
O'er covered graves of soldiers bold,
Whose duty bade them do as told.

Ring Christmas bells! A requiem ring,
To those poor souls, charge not the sin,
For heroes still would keep their throne,
Since human hearts to sin are prone.

Ring Christmas bells the weary long
For wars to cease their awful wrong.
Let angels whisper in each ear
A time of hope and comfort near.

Ring Christmas bells! Ring loud your peal,
That all throughout the world will feel
That "Peace on earth, good will to men,
Are the glad tidings that you bring.

Ring Christmas bells! Let each loud stroke
Proclaim that thralldom to sin's yoke:
With murderous wars the earth will scorn,
When in men's hearts, a Saviour's born.

TO MY VIRGINIA FRIENDS.
(By Wightman Durand Roberts.)

My Christmas gift, dear friends, to thee
Thou'lt find on every branched tree
In every cloud, in every beam,
From all the stars in silvery stream;

Upon thy mountains' ranging view
And in thy sky's deep changing blue,
Where thy intellects on heights abide,
And in thy homes by the old friends.

In all the song birds' sweetest singing,
And where thy wedding bells are ringing,
In the swelling heart, in the falling tear,
When those are gone we held most dear—

Just everywhere, thou friends to me:
On earth, in sky and the sounding sea,
It is the gift from All above
To all below—the gift of Love.

THE BELGIAN'S CHRISTMAS PRAYER.
(By Letty Preston Osborne.)

Peace on earth! Ah! hear our cry,
Thou God of all, this Christmas tide!
We pray Thee let us feel Thy mercy nigh.

Peace, Lord, peace!
We are broken and we are bleeding;
Our land but a blackened waste,
'Tis the prayer of hearts interceding—
Peace, Lord, peace!

Wilt Thou Thy vision veil and listen not
Whilst anguish stalks and terrors multiply?
In vain we plead? Hast Thou forgot?
Peace, Lord, peace!

Oh, God! We ask this at Thy throne:
Peace, Lord, peace!

LIVING IN VIRGINIA.
(By S. G. King.)

In the mountains of Virginia,
Where the mint is growing green,
Where the mountains loom around you
With bubbling streams between;
Where the chestnut trees are loaded
With their nuts so ripe and red—
Yes, its here in old Virginia
Tired ones may rest their heads.

"The garden spot" you've heard it
Some will say it's here or there!
They know not—"I should worry!"
For their errors do you care?

To the Blue Ridge they are strangers;
To "mountain dew" not known;
But its here in old Virginia
Rugged statesmen oft have grown.
So I wend me back from exile
To the Dixieland, so long.
I am living in Virginia!
Help me sing the mountain song!

BELGIUM THANKS AMERICA.
(By Mme. Vandervelde.)

To-day it's Christmas morning: we hear no Christmas bell.
But still we tell the story which once we loved to tell:
"Good will," "Good will!"—we read it,
And "Peace"—we hear the name,
And crouch among the ruins, and watch the cruel flame,
And hear the children crying, and turn our eyes away;

ORIGINAL POEMS BROUGHT FORTH BY CHRISTMAS

Condition of Belgian People Especially Attracts Efforts of Versifiers.

ALL ARE ABOUT HOLIDAYS

But Different Men and Women Consider Day in Various Aspects and From Different Angles—Some Poems of Special Merit.

From its friends in city, State and nation, The Times-Dispatch has received this year an unusually generous offering of Christmas verse. These metrical outpourings of the Christmas spirit reveal varied special inspirations.

The situation of the Belgians apparently has been especially hospitable to the poetic muse. Other verses, however, are in the vein to which the world is more accustomed. Following are some selections from the poets' mail bag:

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THE DAY

BY JAMES MONTAGUE.

Three cheers for Old Man Santa Claus! Once more he's found a way to bring us of hungering hearts the joy of Christmas day. Once more among the toments, where childish hopes glowed dim, He's found the pallid, wide-eyed throng that really needed him. And dreary rooms are bright to-day, and e'en the meanest slum is beautiful with Christmas cheer, for Santa Claus has come. And from a horde of happy throats a grateful chorus swells, To mingle with the merry chime of jingling Christmas bells.

And poverty forgets its woes, and misery and pain; And peace on earth, good-will to men is caroled once again. And though a glad and joyous day, and many glad days after, The humblest tenements will ring with little children's laughter. And mothers' faces will grow young, and work-worn men will smile, And sorrow, woe and grief sink away the while: For Santa Claus has always been a master of the arts That weave a spell of happiness round troubled human hearts.

And you who helped him find the way among the far retreats, Where want and care and famine crept through crooked, dingy streets, Who through the roar and rumble of the city's sweeping tide Could hear the call for happiness that hungry children cried, If you could see the light that shines in myriads of little eyes, The eager faces, beautified with wonder and surprise, And hear the shout of happiness from all that joyful horde, Whatever was your sacrifice, you'd find your full reward.

Three cheers for Old Man Santa Claus! Beneath his magic spell, The bitterest foes the old world knows would wish each other well. The poor make light of poverty, and labor with a will. To do what they can find to do to help the poorer still. And from their purses and their hearts the fortunate of earth Contribute to extend good-will around the merry gift: But best of all, on every hand, the hosts of love arise To light the lamp of Christmastime in little children's eyes.

CHRISTMAS IN DIXIE DURING WARTIME DAYS

Santa Claus Faced Many Difficulties During Latter Days of Conflict.

BLOCKADED BY "ABE LINCOLN"

So Children Were Told When Reindeer Failed to Arrive With Their Jolly Driver and Pack of New Toys and Gifts.

How many readers of "War News Fifty Years Ago" remember the visits of Santa Claus in the South in those trying times—times that tried men's souls? If those awful times tried the souls of grown people what about the little children who had heard of Santa Claus, but because of conditions could receive but very poor, if any, attention from him?

The writer was quite a youngster fifty years ago, just having reached the age when the first doubts as to the real existence of the reindeer and the sleigh, and the jolly and liberal driver of that team had entered his mind and an inkling of who the real Santa was had begun to find slight lodgment in his mind. Therefore, when I heard my mother say that she did not think "Old Abe Lincoln" would allow Santa Claus to come through to the South that Christmas of fifty years ago, I thought I knew what she meant.

In the days previous to the war pretty much all of the luxuries used in the South came from the North. I doubt if there was a single toy, a story in all of the Southern States, and if there had been it could not have made any candy for the Christmas of 1864, for there was no sugar in the land. Our excuse for coffee was sweetened with raw sorghum, made from the up-country sugar cane; our cakes, the same way. There were, of course, no fireworks, no "popcrackers," no Roman candles and nothing else with which to make the holiday noise, and there were no toys to be had in any way. This illustrated the scarcity of Santa Claus supplies, and the scarcity was general all over the South. Where I lived there was absolute poverty, for

WHAT STOCKINGS CONTAINED IN 1864

Bright and early the next morning I took the stocking in hand and made an inventory of its contents. It contained a few shavings, a few sweetened cakes, two small pieces of homemade molasses, or rather sorghum candy, a cupful of popcorn, two faded and discolored toys that had been the property of my grown-up brother when he was my age and who was at that time in General Hood's army, somewhere in Tennessee. That was all, but just as I was about to give up, I saw the mythical Santa Claus who had been forbidden by Lincoln to cross the Mason and Dixon line.

In like manner "Santa Claus" visited thousands of who were stranded homes in the Southland just fifty years ago.

Some years ago a friend gave me a little daughter a beautiful puppy, and she having learned that the "war-time President" of the United States was a great man in his day and time, I desired to name the puppy "Abraham Lincoln." I forbade it, for do you know I have never been able to forgive the great emancipator for keeping Santa Claus out of Dixie fifty years ago?

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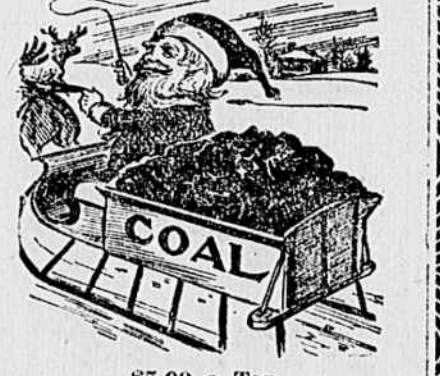
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GREETINGS to OUR FRIENDS

With kindest Christmas greetings to all and sincere good wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year

JÜRGENS